

THE CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY IN ACHEBE'S ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH AND MOFOLO'S CHAKA

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Abstract

The literary landscape has been dominated by the singularly fascinating theme of power, its acquisition, its use and abuse. Chinua Achebe and Thomas Mofolo in *Anthills of the Savanna* and *Chaka* examine the nature of power and authority and its corrupting influence in humans. The novelists' artistic reconstruction of the image of dictatorship follows the universal literary discourse which seeks to find out how each artist contributes to the subject of abuse of political power and authority. Achene employs a significant African philosophical principle of "Chi" as the chief determinant for the incidence of tragedy in his novel while Mofolo exploits the principle of moral choice as the chief determinant for the incidence of tragedy in his work.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe and Thomas Mofolo follow the universal tradition of artistic reconstruction of the image of dictatorship to examine the nature of power and authority in *Anthills of the Savannah* and *Chaka*. In doing so, they bring into relief the corrupting influence of the exercise of power and authority in humans (which invariably leads to conflict). From antiquity to contemporary times, creative works and theories on political governance show evidence of the primary nature of these themes. Literary artists, throughout the ages, have succeeded in reconstructing this human phenomenon of how leaders abuse power, confirming the proposition of "how great calamity can come to man through man's perversity" (Sophocles, 1954:159). How Achene and Mofolo set up their artistic paradigms in the selected novels to reflect the

tragic nature of power in the socio-political context will constitute the central focus of this paper.

Main Body

Mofolo's novel suggests that tragic consequences result when man (a leader) makes wrong choices in handling political power and authority. Achebe's conception of the tragic consequences of abuse of power must be viewed within the range of ideas he throws up in depicting most of his protagonists. Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* come to their tragic ends precisely because they fail to use power within the reasonable confines of societal expectations (Ravenscroft, 1969; Awoonor, 1976; Carrol, 1980; Ojinmah, 1991). Achebe employs in two of his early novels a purely African philosophical principle as the chief determinant for the construction of tragedy. He exploits the Igbo cosmology of *Chi* to dramatise conflict in the manipulation of his themes and heroes in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In both works, the protagonists – Okonkwo and Ezeulu – come to their tragic ends primarily because of their inability to regulate the conflict between their personal aspirations and the will of their *chis* or gods; or between their personal aspirations and the will of their communities.

The concept of *Chi* has been studied by Chukwukere (1971), Nwoga (1967) and Awoonor (1975). The main arguments in all these studies establish that there is an inseparable relation between an individual's will and his essence (supernatural). These two must co-exist to ensure peace, harmony and prosperity for man. When this balance is not maintained between the individual and his *chi*, *chi* can easily take on the role of an agent of destruction, "establishing a relation of manipulation between itself and its owner" (Chukwukere, p.7), engendering conflict and tragic consequences. These belief systems are similar to the Greek concept of destiny, the benevolence of fate, as well as its capricious and malevolent nature, which leads its unsuspecting owner to doom. Igbo ontology insists on a strong bond of harmony between the individual and his *chi*, maintained through humility. Consequently, human weaknesses such as pride, arrogance and disregard for societal will and aspirations are factors that lead to tragedy since they negate the universally accepted quality of humility, which

confers immense gifts on man. Achebe (1975) expresses some illuminating thoughts on the concept of *chi* in Igbo cosmology. He believes in the notion of duality, which is so powerful in Igbo religion and thought; “wherever something stands, something will stand beside it” (p.94). The world in which we live has its double and counterpart in the realm of spirits. There is a physical human being and a complementary spirit being; there is nothing absolute that the physical being can hold onto to the detriment of the will of the spirit being. These ideas establish the mutual relationship between the physical and the spiritual.

When the physical will overrides the will of the spirit, eventual doom is the consequence. Achebe cites a cautionary tale which warns humans of trusting too much in physical strength and valour to the displeasure of the *chi* (supernatural). In the story a proud wrestler decides to go and wrestle in the world of spirits after having defeated every challenger in the physical world. Several attempts to dissuade this man from pursuing his ambition, after defeating almost all the spirit beings, are ignored until his own *chi* appears and smashes him to death. Achebe uses this tale to indicate a limit to man’s aspiration. “The limit is not the sky; it is somewhere much closer to earth. A sensible man will turn round at the frontiers of absolutism and head home again” (Achebe, 1975:96). Clearly, the *chi* has unprecedented veto powers over man’s destiny, making him subject to its will.

Achebe establishes another important point regarding the *chi* concept by expatiating on the belief among the Igbo that the individual is not supreme, absolute, totally free nor is he existentially alone. He argues that the *obvious curtailment of man’s power to walk alone and do as he will is provided by another potent force- the will of his community no man however great can win judgment against all the people (p.99)* (sic.) [Emphasis mine].

This is the focal point of Achebe’s construction of tragedy in most of his novels. He believes that *the will of the people or community* overrides the aspirations of an individual, who fails to control his inflexible will in corrective, acceptable, societal reasoning. *Chi* therefore shares a close link with what society upholds. It is

synonymous with 'the will of community' and whatever an individual does must be judged by the community.

A further extension of these ideas in Igbo cosmology suggest that *chi* does share in the nature of the supreme deity known as *Chukwu* whose link is provided by the **sun**, bringer of day light. Igbo ontology prescribes that "the image of the **sun** serves as an agent of *Chukwu*. This suggest "a divinity which the **sun** shares with *Chukwu*" (Achebe, p.99). Consequently, any human being who takes or accepts the designation of the **sun** has flouted 'the will of the community', which believes in the very essence of the Supreme Being manifesting through the image of the **sun**.

Achebe's viewpoint, coupled with the dramatization of conflict and its tragic consequences in *Anthills of the Savannah* utilises the principles derived from the piece of Igbo cosmology on the *chi* concept. Sam's elaborate character in the fictional world of Kangan demonstrates Achebe's idea of the abuse of power by a leader who fails to construct a strong bond of harmony between his *chi* and himself. The protagonist deliberately contravenes the will of his *chi*, which is synonymous with the will of the community – by subjecting the entire Kangan state to his "Kabisa theology". The phenomenon connotes an unquestionable, omnipotent and omniscient power that has an element of finality. Igbo ontology however prescribes that in Achebe's words, no single individual can win judgment against all the people'.

It is around these repetitive acts of Sam that Achebe constructs the nature of power and its tragic consequences in *Anthills*. The novelist's artistry in handling the theme provides the context that the reader must use to appreciate Sam's tragic fall. One of the novel's characters, Ikem Osodi, analyses the prime failure of Sam's government. He establishes that it is Sam's "*failure to re-establish vital links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart which throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being*" (p.130/131). If the real purpose of attaining political power is to meet, among other things, the spiritual, physical and material needs of society then the inability of Sam's government to meet these needs of the populace of Kangan is the very basis of Achebe's criticism of Sam's use of power. It is also partly to this that

Achebe ascribes Sam's tragic failure when he denies the mutuality of interest that should bind him to his people.

At the beginning of the novel, Achebe enacts the drama of a delegation, comprising elders from Abazon to the presidential palace in Bassa. They have come wanting to invite H.E Sam to their province to atone for their opposition to him when he sought to install himself as the president for life two years earlier. The delegation had also come to seek an antidote for a severe drought, which had plagued their province. Sam's refusal to meet the delegation and respond to their needs indicates his turning his back on his *chi* as signified by the will of the community.

Achebe employs construct and ironic twists to convey this argument with the detailed description of the extravagant Presidential Guest House at Abichi Lake Resort, a metaphor for opulent abuse of power, vis-avis the poor dehumanizing conditions in which the people of Abazon Province live. The irresponsibly extravagant forty-five million spent to construct the Resort and the twenty-five million spent on its refurbishment provide the context in which we view Sam's government as irresponsible and insensitive to the plight of the ordinary people of Kangan state. Achebe is asking how such money can be wasted for the comfort of an individual when the whole province is plagued with guinea worm, a severe drought and a generally terrible economic state of affairs. The frivolities, coupled with the obscene feasts that are regular in Abichi Lake Resort contrast sharply with the filth, squalor, degradation and abject poverty that characterize the Northern Abazon Province. Sam exhibits gross disregard for the people of Abazon whilst he entertains the cheeky girl from Arizona, the American Journalist Lou Cranford. She has direct access to Sam while the Elders of Abazon are turned away at the palace gates. Sam has obviously failed his people because he wields power as a means of exhibiting his despotic tendencies and by this denying his *chi*. The six elders are arrested and incarcerated with the excuse that they are "a bunch of hoodlums who have come to storm the Presidential place" while the leader showers all his attention on Lou Cranford.

Achebe employs the above episode to indicate and dramatise Sam's misplaced priorities. The protagonist's reason for refusing to meet the peaceful, loyal and

“goodwill” delegation from Abazon lacks logic; it portrays him as opposing the will of his people. He sees their visit as a “sheer sign(s) of indiscipline” (p.15) while the visit of the impertinent and loquacious Lou Cranford is celebrated with merry-making and extravagant waste of resources. These contrasting events and ironic twists confirm that Sam has distanced himself from his community. The novelist devotes more than half of the narration in *Anthills* to illustrating how Sam opposes the will of his people and by this hastens to his eventual doom. In narratological terms, Achebe devoting half of the narration to Sam’s opposition to the will of the people show the importance the novelist attaches to the unacceptability of his behaviour and a reinforcement of that opposition as a prime indicator of Sam’s tragic demise.

Sam’s relationship with his courtiers and the entire citizenry of Kangan proves that he is “the holder of the yam and knife” (a metaphor for absolutism). During the formal proceedings of the cabinet meeting in Kangan state, the opening edict of His Excellency Sam to his courtier Chris, *You are wasting every body’s time..... I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa!. The matter is closed* (p.1).

presupposes that His Excellency’s rulings are unchangeable and unquestionable. His Excellency Sam terrorizes his courtiers reducing them to a chorus of boot-lickers and sycophants. Achebe uses animal imagery to describe Sam’s tyrannical and arbitrary rule in Kangan. The cabinet members are “put away in a wooden locker” for more than one hour after having been made to “lie close to their holes as rats do ready to scramble in “(p.3/52). Newspaper editors are ‘caged’ and ‘ignored’ with NTBB (Not to be Broadcasted) edicts (1). Chris explains this NTBB concept when he says, “it is anything *inconvenient* to those in government” (p.25). Consequently, Ikem Osodi can be kicked out of his job by a directive from H.E. Sam for publishing anti-government articles, suspended, trailed and arrested in his home at 1:15am, brutally assaulted and finally shot dead in cold blood.

Sam uses lies, distortion and gruesome acts to silence vociferous citizens. The State Research Council, an unconstitutional body formed by His Excellency’s government with the sole purpose of tracking down what they call “unpatriotic elements” in Kangan, is used to terrorise the populace. It is more than ironic that such a body claims it is

protecting and safeguarding the freedom and security of law-abiding citizens when in reality it terrorizes and massacres law-abiding citizens.

Achebe employs the linguistic feature of italicization to express his disgust with Sam's government. The italicization of the news bulletin names Ikem, an innocent citizen, as the mastermind behind the supposed dastardly plot to destabilize the government. The circumstances surrounding the arrest and tragic death of Ikem are suspicious. His Excellency, typical in these situations of abuse of power, has already appointed a high-level inquiry into the 'accident' with a directive to commence investigations immediately.

The novelist uses this episode to highlight the calculated lies and dubious strategies of a tyrannical government. He portrays this deceit and asks whether it is not strange that a man who is handcuffed and has been beaten severely by major Samsonite's men will dare seize a gun from his captors in an attempt to fight against more than ten soldiers in a moving vehicle. Ikem is shot dead. The appointment of "a high-level inquiry" (p.155) into the supposed accident by His Excellency may suggest that the head of state knows nothing about this happening. This charade, Achebe suggests, is typical of most dictatorial governments.

Achebe's treatment of the nature of power and its inevitable consequence in tragedy does not only portray the crude strategies of dictators but also reveals the kind of fear and torment that engulfs the ordinary people. The final comment from one of the tenants to Chris and Beatrice, about Ikem's abduction, clearly illustrates this. To the informant, *this our country na waa. Na only God go save person.* (p.153).

The police hunt for student leaders who are bundled and arrested. Fear grips the citizenry as Jeep-loads of mobile police forces are deployed to brutalize university students. The individuals' freedoms of movement are curtailed because of "a large number of army and police road blocks springing up all over the city" (p.160). Combined army and police checkpoints are mounted with military jeeps and police patrol cars flashing their roof-lamps as they patrol the whole state of Kangan terrifying and terrorizing innocent citizens.

Beatrice and Elewa's experiences with the military are traumatic and frightful. They are terrorized in the middle of the night as three army jeeps fully loaded with soldiers ransack Beatrice's home. The "hash crunch of tyres on the pebbled drive way", startles Beatrice as the security personnel bark orders at her to 'open up at once' (p.162). Achebe's description of the conduct of this search party in Beatrice's home really wins our sympathy for Beatrice and Elewa and at the same time evokes emotions of hatred and disgust in us for high-handedness. This is given credence with the authorial commentary:

What kind of enigma was this? Could there really be even one decent young man in the security services or indeed the entire Kangan Army and Police. Or was this the ultimate evil-the smiling face of Mephistopheles in the beguiling habit of a monk? Safer by far to believe the worst (p.163).

The above comments pointedly establish the extent of ruthlessness unleashed by Sam's government on innocent citizens. Achebe's artistry that criticizes Sam's abuse of power reveals the queer and contemptuous state of his protagonist. His expatriate character, Mad Medico, observes how boring and eccentric dictators can be. Quoting Lord Acton, Medico informs his friend Dick that *The most awful thing about power is not that it corrupts absolutely but that it makes people so utterly boring, so predictable and just plain uninteresting* (p.51). The way Sam wields and exercises power makes him a threat to society.

Achebe graphically paints a picture of the combined operations of dictatorship both on the part of the dictators and on the part of the ordinary citizens who endure the worst of absolutism in Ikem's Hymn, composed in honour of the **SUN**. The **SUN** is invigorated by an omnipotent power similar to that of Sam's ruthless rule, which massacres and decimates ordinary peasants. Ironically the **SUN**, which should be a life-sustaining element in nature, is presented replete with a contradiction as benign and destructive. Is Sam expected to be generous but he is destructive, divine but devilish and brutish? Is it a divorce between his ego and his super-ego (chi) that leads to is destruction? It is all a question of power corrupting absolutely.

The **SUN** is given appellations such as: “*Single Eye of God*”; “*Undying Eye of God*”, “*Wide-eyed insomniac*”, “*Great messenger of the Creator*”, “*Great carrier of Sacrifice to the Almighty*”. These appellations portray Sam’s invisibility and assumption of the role of God. In the Hymn, Achebe describes how the **SUN** decimates and ravages terrestrial life, aquatic life, human life and any living thing under the “Undying Eye of God”. The results is a piteous sight. The dead are left unburied, household animals are roasted to death; hunger gnaws at human beings causing them to abandon their ancestral homes. “The trees [had] become hydra-headed bronze statues so ancient that only blunt residual features remain[ed] on their faces, like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the Savannah about last year’s bush fires” (p.28).

Achebe’s imagery above establishes that Sam, as synonymous with the **SUN**, has truly burnt everything on earth and the result is a vast wasteland. The imagery of the ‘anthills’ and ‘savannah’ establishes that dictators like Sam, (SUN)-Savannah see humans – anthills- as insignificant beings. Achebe conveys the above ideas in a series of rhetorical questions that open the paragraph of Ikem’s Hymn: *Great carrier of Sacrifice to the Almighty: Single Eye of God! Why have you brought this on us? What hideous abomination forbidden and for bidden and forbidden again seven times have we committed or else condoned what error that no reparation can hope to erase?* (p.28).

Truly, Sam’s government has denied the people the mutuality of benefit they are to enjoy under a leader. One wonders whether ordinary human beings have ever committed an abominable crime to suffer under dictatorship.

Achebe exploits another element to demonstrate the nature of power and its debilitating effect on his protagonist. The novelist sticks this element of Sam’s admiration of the Whites into the story as a stock comment on the protagonist’s actions. His artistry in handling Sam’s infatuation with the white race, especially the English indicates the protagonist’s denial of his people and subscribing to the values of foreigners. Sam becomes an intellectually dependent fellow. Ikem Osodi identifies this as the protagonist’s major flaw, namely: that “all he ever wanted was to do what was expected of him by the English whom he admired sometimes to the point of

foolishness” (p.45). Ikem cites the example of their headmaster, John Williams, who convinces H.E. to abandon his initial thoughts of becoming a doctor to become a soldier.

Sam’s infatuation with the English is further illustrated when he chooses his models from amongst the customs of the English, especially their well-to-do classes. He tells Ikem about his elegant pipe which he once spent a whole morning choosing in a May Fair shop in Britain. His imitation of the English “who have a long career of subduing savages in distant lands” (p.47) has a far-reaching effect in moulding his character into a dictator. H.E. Sam has the insatiable desire to rule forever like the British. He is prepared to sacrifice his old friends- Chris, Ikem and Medico- because of his personal ambition and bad advice from the Attorney-General and Major Johnson (Samsonite) Ossai who supervises the final examination of the three men. In Achebe’s view, this is one of the unpardonable “Crimes” a dictator can commit against humanity. By this act, Sam has rejected his own chi, which is synonymous with his own people against whom he cannot win a judgment. Consequently, he designs, through the Aristotelian as well as the Igbo concept of poetic justice that Sam must pay the price of challenging his chi to a wrestling contest, he was bound to lose. Sam is dethroned through a coup, kidnapped from the Palace by “*unknown persons*”, tortured, shot in the head and buried under one foot of soil in the bush (p.203). Achebe points at another kind of ‘flaw’ in Sam, which precipitates his tragic fall. This is Sam’s disregard for advice and his persistence in following his perverse ways. Just as Creon (in Sophocles’ *Antigone*) who refuses to heed sane counsel from Haemon, the Chorus and Tieresias, Sam refuses to visit the drought- prone zone of Abazon Province. Chris advises Sam to visit Abazon as a means of making amends to his own people in consonance with Igbo tradition but he refuses deciding to enter into a contest against his people. Contrary to Igbo ontology, Sam appropriates a choice that leads to his eventual doom.

Achebe’s portrayal of the excesses of power in Sam’s personality is supplemented by “the divinity that controls remotely but diligently the transactions of the marketplace that is the world” (p.93). He exploits the myth of “Idemili’s contempt for man’s unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows” as the motif in the novel to check

the dictatorial tendencies of Sam. Achebe tells the story of a certain man, “handsome beyond compare but in randiness as unbridled as the odorous he-goat”. He goes in search of position and authority (ozo title). His inability to observe the due processes involved in the acquisition of the ozo title and his deliberate abuse of the office compels *Eke-Idemili*, the royal python deity, to send him “straight and true as an arrow to his death” (p.95/96). This motif re-asserts Achebe’s reliance on a traditional concept to construct his tragedy.

Nadine Gordimer (1988) observes that *in the person of Sam, president of Kangan, Achebe sagely illustrates that those whom the gods would make mad with power to destroy us they first disguise to us as absurd* (p.2).

The absurdity of Sam’s rapacious use of power as portrayed suggests that he has been “ringed by the gods” for inevitable destruction. As in the case of Classical tragedy, the key elements of flaw in character, and the wrath of the gods and their intervention in human affairs are critical underpinning issues that engender tragedy in the Greek heroes – King Oedipus and Creon; Sam’s tragic death seems to have been orchestrated community, according to Achene, must win in any power struggle.

Mofolo’s Construction of Tragedy

The search for the ideal, coupled with the phenomenon of self-satisfaction of the heroes or heroine, constitutes the ideals that Mofolo demonstrates in his works, *Moeti oa Bochabela*, *Pitseng* and *Chaka*. In all the three works, Mofolo achieves a striking similarity in the structural construction of the narratives. The protagonists are dissatisfied with their conditions; consequently, they all desire an ideal state of bliss and happiness. Mofolo’s artistry indicates that these burning and insatiable desires in the protagonists must be regulated by universally accepted moral standards. Consequently, the moral choices of each of the protagonists will determine either the happiness or the tragedy that awaits them at the end.

In *Moeti*, Fekisi the hero is dissatisfied with the degraded life of lies, deceit, vice and debauchery on the part of his compatriots whose hearts he had tried unsuccessfully to

change. He resolves to leave in search of the ideal in order to avoid being corrupted. Fekisi's decision to abruptly leave the village and look for a perfect society devoid of artificial laws, police officers and jails becomes the motif with which Mofolo constructs the final verdict by the end of the novel. Did Fekisi make a right choice? He departs from the village for the quiet retreat by the shores of the Indian Ocean. His desire for the ideal leads to his meeting the three white men who convince him to make a choice for heaven. His 'glorious' death establishes Mofolo's artistic claim that choices are important landmarks that man will have to make in his search for the ideal.

Mofolo presents similar ideas in *Pitseng*, an idyllic story of the hero and heroine-Alfred Phakoe and Aria Sebeka who are also dissatisfied with the moral degradation of their peers' courtship games. Alfred and Aria's decision and choice to aspire for perfect love, devoid of immorality and sexual promiscuity, become the controlling force in the novel. In their search for the ideal love, Mofolo subjects them to a series of tests, which challenge their decision as they interact with various kinds of people. The author rewards their resolute approach to life and moral choice with happiness and blissful love. He appropriates the Christian idea of redemption from sin and its degradation, with its grounding in choices, providing a significant pointer to the Chaka story. In *Chaka*, Mofolo exploits the same principle of moral choice. By the end of the story, the protagonist will be judged as to whether he pursued the right path or not. Just as the protagonists of *Moeti and Pitseng*, Chaka is dissatisfied with the hostility, rancor and death threats from his own biological by the gods who would not countenance any single individual 'to win a judgment against all the people'. The father in Ncube village. He decides to leave the village to avoid being killed. Chaka's choice to run away into the wilderness and his longing for power, fame and authority are important factors in examining his tragic end.

A few critics like Haywood (1976) and Gleason (1965) who have condemned Mofolo's Chaka as an evil, bloodthirsty megalomaniac fail to grasp the author's artistic manipulation of the principle of moral choice. The story of Chaka's tragedy is made to rest squarely on the issue of choice. Mofolo leaves his readers to decide who bears the responsibility for all the good and the evil in the novel. In constructing his tragedy around this principle, Mofolo exploits the traditional African system of seeking a true

royal son to inherit a ruler, one imbued with an adequate spirit of chivalry in administering a state. The artist however imposes the Christian morality of sin and its consequences on the actions of all the characters. For purposes of this study, our focus will centre on two characters - Senzangakhona and Chaka – whose handling of power is regulated by the principle of moral choice.

Senzangakhona, the reigning king, is faced with the prospect of dying without an heir despite the fact that he already has “three or four wives” who cannot bear him a son. Faced with this prospect, the king hopes to raise a son by marrying another woman. His failure to follow the due process involved in marrying Nandi and his unrestrained sexual desires in breaking the virginity of Nandi against custom make the circumstances around the birth of the son - Chaka – ‘sinful’ (Mofolo, p.11). The novelist raises an important issue of how powerful leaders take advantage of people and exploit them for their personal comforts.

Mofolo is intrigued by the traditional African custom of seeking a male son to inherit the throne. Consequently, the author endorses Senzangakhona’s search for the “ideal” but imposes a moral choice and sanction on his actions. Kunene argues that the circumstances of Chaka’s conception become the mainspring of the tragedy (p.137). The novelist allows the reader to assess the king’s actions. He exposes some issues, before the reader, including Nandi’s refusal to be deflowered by Senzangakhona, who uses “a lot of deceitful talk” to convince her to succumb to his sexual desires (p.5). Again Nandi’s pre-marital conception, the rivalry, scandal and blackmail that develop later relating to the senior wives who know that Nandi’s “month did not reach the number of months of pregnancy of woman” are portrayed to readers (p.10). The tensions that develop later when Chaka’s half-brothers appear on the scene contending for the throne accentuate the hatred and animosity generated by the entire community against Nandi and her son.

Mofolo succeeds in increasing the dramatic tensions in the plot with the above episodes, which serve as the background for the tragedy. The underlying principle of the tragedy, Mofolo insists is placed on the choices that Senzangakhona makes in respect of his search for the ideal. The novelist achieves a high degree of dramatic

tension by focusing attention on the childhood experiences of Chaka in his father's village Nobamba. Chaka's childhood and boyhood experiences have been the bitterest of his experiences, for "truly there never was a child whose growing up was as painful as Chaka's" (p.12). Chaka is 'grabbed', 'caught', 'thrashed', 'held', 'battered' and 'bashed' on several occasions, until Senzangakhona gives the order to all his people and the people of Ncube's saying, 'kill him!' (p.33). For Mofolo, this demonstrates a leader's abuse of power arising from a moral choice to cover up his guilt and punish the innocent. This, in pure psychological terms, prepares Chaka for a career of ruthless and untiring pursuit of power both as an instrument of revenge and glorification of his Zulu nation.

The authorial comments in respect of the edict to kill Chaka arouse a sense of sympathy in the reader for the young man who had *indeed become a hare-that-was-truck-on-the-ear, one-without-parents, a buffalo-standing-all-by-itself, because all those who saw him fought him without any reason at all* (p.33).

The stock of imagery used, coupled with the song of grief raised by the age-mates of Nandi, confirms the fact that *"The king is without truth" and must be blamed for the later development of Chaka's personality. Mofolo establishes that the real issue, the cause of it all, was that Nandi and Senzangakhona suffered from guilt...if Senzangakhona had not committed this shame-ful deed in his youth, Chaka would have been at his home at Nobamba, a precious child dearly loved by his father* (p.34). In fright, Chaka runs away from Ncube village unto the wilderness where an important phase of his story will be enacted.

It is clear that Mofolo's story telling technique with its focus on Senzangakhona's choice generated a multiplicity of tensions and conflicts. These manifest the oppressive and selfish nature of power that will be harnessed to create Chaka's "hunger and thirst" for the ideal power, fame and authority. Mofolo manipulates Chaka's search for the ultimate – to become king in order to take the kingship of his father as a means of revenge on society. He introduces the woman doctor from Bungane, the King of the Deep Pool, Isanusi and his assistant whose activities and dealings with Chaka really stir up the protagonist's vaulting ambition. As Chaka

interacts with all these people, Mofolo imposes a moral responsibility on him to choose either the path of life or doom. It also illustrates the subtle nature of how power shapes Chaka's life and thought processes.

Chaka's encounter with the Woman doctor from Bungane occurs against the background of Nandi seeking protection for herself and her son against the onslaught of evil forces and people who will wish to have them dead. The processes and injunctions involved in "doctoring" Chaka during his early years indicate Mofolo's manipulation of the principle of choice. Chaka is expected to bathe in a large river alone, out of view of people, expecting to be visited by the "exceptional"; a feat Mofolo allows Chaka to "volunteer of his own accord" whether to keep as a secret to himself or make it public (p.9). This choice the novelist allows the protagonist to make sets the stage for Chaka's tragic fall. Mofolo exploits these choices, which Chaka has to make voluntarily with a clear sense of purpose and commitment during his encounter with the Monster of the Deep. The eerie descriptions of the setting of the pool, the large Monster and the purification process of licking Chaka's face and his entire body with the forked tongue of the snake have the purpose of determining the level of Chaka's courage and of establishing the 'principle of choices' which he has to make. Chaka has to maintain a challenging steady gaze with the monster, which demands voluntary and willing acceptance from him. This condition must be fulfilled before Chaka will receive the power, fame and glory he desires. Chaka's resolve to sustain the eye-lock combat with the fiery monster until the "purification processes" are over is adequately rewarded with a very soft voice, which declares:

*Hail! Hail! This land is yours, child of my compatriot, you shall rule over nations and their kings. You shall rule over peoples of diverse traditions. You shall even rule over the winds and the sea. Storms and the pools of large rivers that run deep; And all things shall obey you with unquestioning obedience, And shall kneel at your feet! O yes, Oi! Oi! **Yet you must go by the right path.** (p.24) [Emphasis mine].*

The annunciation of Chaka's sovereign rule manifests the dual nature of power which must be regulated by acceptable norms. The multiplicity of the voices, the billowing of the water together with the mist that opened and seeped into Chaka's body create a

spiritual aura around Chaka's future rule. Mofolo imposes a moral injunction on Chaka's rule, which must be regulated by the "right path". This injunction is wedged into the consciousness of Chaka who alone hears the voices despite the fact that "Nandi was not so far away" from where these ominous things are happening. Chaka's encounter with Isanusi depicts "the continuing metamorphosis of his personality and general philosophy of life" (Kunene, 113). It demonstrates Mofolo's success in justifying Chaka's hunger for revenge, power and fame. Prior to the encounter, Chaka has been brutally assaulted, chased out and denied his rightful claim to the throne by his own relatives. As he hides in the wilderness, reflecting on his childhood experiences, he realizes that people live by might only, and not by right (p.35). Further, he understands the rules that govern human relationships in life. He concludes that "he would do just as he pleased, and that, whether a person was guilty or not, he would simply kill him if he so wished, for that is the law of man" (p.35).

This new idea of indiscriminately killing people filters through Chaka's personality. Mofolo cleverly welds it into the centre of Chaka's freedom of choice as the reader sympathizes with him. There is a sustained reasonableness for Chaka's resolution at this point in his life since Mofolo does not indict him but sustains the reader's sympathy for Chaka by creating motivations in him as to how best he can take his revenge "the day that sun of his will rise" (p.35). The novelist achieves this through Isanusi, Malunga, and Ndlebe the characters "from nowhere". The creation of these characters confirms Mofolo's fertile imagination, which seeks to place double opposites before Chaka. Appearing harmless, they have the potency to lead one towards doom. Isanusi appears to Chaka after the latter has resolved to kill anyone he wished in revenge for the harsh treatment he suffered.

The novelist presents Isanusi as a doctor, diviner and prophet who diagnoses Chaka's "ailment". He promises to help him attain "the ideal" – the father's throne and his revenge on society. The whole sense of the meeting is so artistically manipulated that Chaka's defenses as a human being are completely broken and what seems uppermost in Chaka's mind is how to obtain his 'ideal'. Power and authority are manipulated for a strong psychological effect in shaping Chaka's choices. Isanusi exploits Chaka's helplessness: *First, before we go into details, I ask whether you bind*

yourself to observe all my commandments completely?.....because there is nothing I can do unless you so bind yourself (p.40).

Chaka affirmatively declares:

I bind myself to abide by your commandments in every way in which you will command me (p.41).

Mofolo now shifts focus from Chaka's sympathies and concentrates fully on the moral choices that lie ahead. He places the entire moral responsibility on Chaka and he never spares the opportunity to indict him for choosing the path of death rather than of life. As in the case of Macbeth, enthralled by the witches' prophecy, Shakespeare spurs his hero's hunger for power (the throne of Scotland), so does Mofolo with Chaka. Mofolo imposes a moral responsibility on Chaka just as Shakespeare does on Macbeth.

Chaka's total acceptance of Isanusi's injunctions suggests that the benevolent human side of Chaka is gradually yielding to the more aggressive part that at first demands only justice, but soon demands more, namely revenge as well as power. (Kunene, 116). Since Chaka has now become a pawn in the hands of Isanusi, Mofolo manipulates him using paradoxical statements and deliberate equivocations of the diviner. The diviner's skill and dexterity in 'doctoring' Chaka influences him. Isanusi takes this opportunity and asks whether Chaka wants "a medicine associated with the spilling of blood, with killing: It is extremely evil but it is also extremely good. Choose!" (p.43). Chaka's positive response, "I want it", attracts an indictment from Mofolo who comments: *And now the final link has been cut, Chaka has deliberately chosen death instead of life (p.43).*

Chaka's descent into this state of morbidity results from Isanusi's manipulations. Mofolo, however, plays down the subtle catalytic roles of Isanusi and his assistants in transforming Chaka's human personality into a "man beast" form, which kills whomever it wishes to kill. That is the law of this world (p.48). He now focuses on the 'frightening vengeance' that has filled Chaka's heart as he makes Isanusi conjure up the metaphorical imagery of "mud and marshes of rains that fall in torrents" (p.42) and

the parable of “the diligent cultivator of sorghum” as Chaka appropriately uses the spear to spill much blood (p.46). The Mofolo makes the tragedy believable as he proclaims an important “flaw” (both in the Classical and African traditional senses) in Chaka’s life during the glorious height of the founding of his new nation. Chaka “creates” a new greeting which he expects his subjects to use for him alone. The explanation is that he received it from Nkulunkulu, the Great-Great one. If the subjects obey the injunction, rewards of blessing will come to them as individuals and as a nation. But disastrous consequences will visit the nation if they disobey since” ...lions will tear you to pieces, your cows will always miscarry, your women will never be heavy with child, your fields will fail to yield crops, the rains will cease to fall, and your enemies will rise against you” (p.115). The greeting is **BAYEDE**, -“*He that is between God and men*”.

The graphological rendition of the greeting together with the various setting and occasions that Mofolo appropriates from the greetings of the subjects introduce a new dimension of Chaka’s “flaw”; that of hero-worship and equating himself with the gods. When Chaka changes the name of his new-found nation to “Zulu! Muzulu!” (the sky, people of the sky), to the utter surprise of Isanusi and his disciples, Mofolo comments:..... *and we too are surprised and wonder how great were the desires and the **impudence in the heart of this Makone that he compared himself to the greatness of the heavens!*** [Emphasis mine, (p.103]. This comparison with the heavens portrays the carnelian pride in Chaka, his egomania and immodesty, rivaling the gods and in the process incurring their wrath. Mofolo reinforces this view point when he makes all the ‘sisters’, councilors, people and beasts praise Chaka’s beautiful face and his tall stature and his heart that is afraid of nothing. These are taken as an indication that:

Chaka had been sent by the gods among the people; it was said that the heart that was in him were not those of ordinary mortals, but were the heart and the spirit of Nkulunkulu himself...for those who would fight him had better first fight with the gods and conquer them, and then only should they dare to face him (p.103/104) [sic]. Chaka’s megalomania takes on a recognizable shape as people speculate that he and his fiancée, Noliwa, are both messengers of Nkulunkulu. The God encourages them in their belief as the people kneel before them and worship them as the supreme God.

And worthy this pleases Chaka but Noliwa is embarrassed because she knows she is just a mortal as all other human beings. The contrasting attitudes with Chaka and Noliwa exhibit towards hero-worship provide another incident for Mofolo to manipulate the hero whose ambition knows no bounds. Chaka dares the supernatural and like Achebe's hero- Sam in *Anthills* – he challenges the very essence of his being, Chi, as he subjects the entire Mazulu Empire to torture, pain and total annihilation. Noliwa on the other hand exhibits humanness and serves as Chaka's conscience. The reader therefore admires her simplicity and modesty while Chaka is hated and despised. Mofolo exploits these contrasting attitudes and manipulates them to create an insatiable desire in Chaka to long for a greater kingship which surpasses all other kingdoms on earth. Mofolo welds this into the critical point in Chaka's freedom of choice. He presents the most painful choice before Chaka to decide between a greater kingship and someone he loves more than anyone else in the world.

Mofolo exploits time and parallel structures to create the dramatic tension which precedes Chaka's tragic fall. First Chaka agrees to murder Noliwa without hesitation. He is restrained by Isanusi and given a full year (though reduced to nine months, at Chaka's insistence) to reconsider his decision. After the expiration of the nine-month period, Chaka remains firm in his resolve to murder Noliwa. Mofolo however artistically reduces the haste and urgency in Chaka by allowing Isanusi to caution him and indicate to Chaka that the step to be taken will take him to the point of no return. He even suggests to Chaka, more than five times, that other bestial forces more terrible will control him.

Chaka's resolve to murder Noliwa is rendered through parallel structures to suggest the "kind of person" he is; that he is not "someone whose mind is fickle". He responds: *I. Chaka, do not know how to speak two things with one mouth. What I have spoken I have spoken* (p.122). Tensions begin to mount, presaging eminent doom for both Chaka and Noliwa since the word "*kinship*" seals their fates. Mofolo makes treachery an important element in this tragic episode. Noliwa expresses genuine love for Chaka, for "all beautiful things which a true wife might do for her husband and which Chaka ever experienced he received from Noliwa. And even as he betrayed her like that and planned her murder, his conscience ate him up and gave him no rest; it told him he

had strayed from the straight path of human compassion. Yet, because of his desire for kingship, he suppressed it and pushed ahead, and walked about carrying death on his shoulders" (p.121). In "killing Noliwa, Chaka symbolically murders love, life and beauty; but worse still, he murders trust: (Kunene, 169). As in the case of Okonkwo's murder of Ikemefuna in *Things Fall Apart* (infanticide) Chaka's murder of Noliwa brings him to a point where inevitable doom and destruction are the obvious consequences.

The reader's eyes are more steadily focused on his freedom of choice and the responsibility for whatever he chooses. Mofolo turns attention to the measureable changes that occur in Chaka's life after his choice to murder Noliwa for the great kingship. Chaka's capacity to distinguish between war and murder is gone and he kills without reason. Mofolo devotes the rest of the narration to recounting the barbarous deeds of Chaka. The irony of the situation is that Chaka decimates the very kingdom he decides to build as he indiscriminately kills both enemies and his own subjects. The reader begins to observe Chaka becoming schizophrenic as he draws close to his tragic end. Mofolo's presentation of Chaka at this stage is similar to Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, Camus' Caligula and Shakespeare's Macbeth. Chaka disregards human value just as the above protagonists do. This unbending, self-centered and autocratic, nature makes him trample upon acceptable societal norms in order to satisfy his personal ego.

Chaka's rule ends in total tragedy and despair, emperor Chaka who had once been admired and praised as the *Beautiful child, most excellent one! Sport of the women of Nomgabi* (p.111) is repelled and detested by his own subjects. An interesting analogy can be drawn between the Faustian pact in Marlowe's *Mephistopheles* and Mofolo's *Isanusi*. As is in the case of Dr. Faustus, "Chaka enjoys a few years of power, glory and the unrestricted indulgence of his most whimsical desires; but at the end of his reign he suffers a terrible death preceded by psychological, emotional and physical torture" (Kunene, 127/128). This reflects the transient nature of power, its propensity to deceive the wielder into assuming that he is invisible. As it often happens, the tragic deaths of these heroes are inevitable.

Chaka is haunted by dreadful nightmares, insomnia and a persistent restlessness connected with the results of his choice. In the din and turmoil of his life, he regularly “sees a Zulu spear piercing his heart”; he hears a jackal crying, a hyena creams, a dog’s piercing howl rends the night’s sky. [Chaka] is “seized with an incredible fear and he wept bitter tears” (p.159). This reversal of fortune in Chaka’s life, made more concrete with the persistent imagery of conflicts and turmoil is designed to arouse pity and fear in the reader. Here is a man who is described at birth *as an ox of the vultures* but as he draws close to his death, he is described as *gasping like an ox suffering from the mmamotowane disease, with its ears drooping besides* (p.6/164). His own brothers Dingana and Mhalangana finally murder him.

Mofolo constructs his tragedy around the principle of choice. Chidi Ikonne (cited in Heywood, 1976:62) observes that there is nothing wrong in making a tragic hero a conscious chooser even if he is not responsible for what he chooses. Great tragic heroes such as Oedipus, Macbeth, including heroes like Okonkwo, Ezeulu, Odewale, Sam and others make conscious choices even though they are not completely responsible for these. It can be presumed therefore that the tragedies of such great heroes may be attributed to some forces beyond their control. The artists impose moral responsibilities on the various choices the heroes make providing the basis and the propelling factor for their tragic ends.

Conclusion

Mofolo and Achebe have succeeded in constructing complex interplay of inner and outer forces in their works, *Chaka and Anthills*. It is clear that the reader’s ‘contempt’ for Chaka does not necessarily mean that Mofolo’s “purpose” is to make his hero detestable and admirable. His intention is to examine the nature of power and its corruptible influence in the life of man. He consciously imposes well-founded, observable values of “ruling by the right path” (p.24) on Chaka. Achebe on the other hand aims at portraying a gloomy picture of a leader who consciously flouts the will of his community for his personal glory going ultimately against his deepest inner deity, *chi*. That Sam is booted out of office through the barrel of the gun, kidnapped, tortured, killed and buried under one foot of soil in the bush serves the purpose of

retributive justice for a man who sought to win a judgment against the community by violating his personal deity.

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